

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1-23. (canceled)

24. (previously presented) Process for the treatment of tobacco leaves (*Nicotiana tabacum*) comprising the following steps: a) drying and curing of the leaves; b) extraction of dried leaves with a solvent or mixture of solvents ; c) re-drying of the extracted leaves; d) elimination of the ribs.

25. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the solvent is selected from methanol, ethanol, propanol, isopropanol, acetone, ethylene glycol, water or mixtures thereof; possibly adjusting pH with buffers.

26. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 25, wherein the solvent is ethanol.

27. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 26, wherein the solvent mixture is an ethanol/water mixture with a strength of between 20° and 80°.

28. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 27, wherein the mixture has a strength of 50°.

29. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the weight ratio between tobacco and solvent mixture is between 1: 5 and 1: 30.

30. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 29, wherein the weight ratio between tobacco and solvent mixture is 1 : 16.

31. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the extraction carried out for a time of between 3 and 16 hours.

32. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 31, wherein the extraction carried out for 8 hours.

33. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the extraction temperature is between 20 and 80°C.

34. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 33, wherein the extraction temperature is 60°C.

35. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the extraction is performed 1-5 times.

36. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 35, wherein the extraction carried out once.

37. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the leaves are re-dried under vacuum.

38. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the leaves are re-dried for 36-48 hours.

39. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the leaves are re-dried at the temperature of 35°C.

40. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein Virginia Bright tobacco leaves are used.

41-46. (canceled)